

Chaplain Mike Enschede  
Chaplaincy Coordinator, Department of Corrections  
Alaska Faith-Based and Community Initiatives Scoping Meeting  
Loussac Library  
February 20, 2003 at 10:00 am

There are two main things I want to share with you this morning. The first is about our success - what has worked in the Department of Corrections Chaplaincy Program. Our program is probably the best example of a government faith-based partnership in this State. We are talking about a major league community involvement and partnership and how desperately needed it is. When it comes to Corrections there are some things our State can do well, Public Safety for example. On the other hand, there are some things that perhaps are not that impressive, in particular, prisoner reformation.

The most effective prisoner reformation program in Corrections is the community-based chaplaincy program. This partnership consists of about 500 church and religious organizations within the State. That partnership is providing about 1500 approved lay and clergy faith-based providers within all of our institutions within this State. It is also providing substantial private sector faith-based funding to augment the State resources that are being provided. That ratio is about 50 percent State funded to 50 percent privately funded. I honestly do not know what we would do without the partnership with the private sector. I can assure you there would not be much of a Chaplaincy program within the Department of Corrections.

Those private funds help to provide personnel, programs and even building prison chapels. This last fiscal year we had over 100,000 in total prisoner attendance in religious and faith-based programs in our institutions. The only reason this happened was because of the involvement of the faith community and this wonderful partnership between church and State.

This partnership works and crime is in its final analysis a community problem. Through the chaplaincy program the faith community is having a positive and impressive impact in the process of prisoner reformation.

I suggest this State take a serious look and perhaps follow the example of the State of Texas.

*Government's Aversion to Faith-Based Treatment:* Unfortunately, current Texas law crowds out valuable faith-anchored programs by failing to take into account their unique nature and philosophy. By exhibiting a strong sense of "credentialism" and dismissing religious volunteers as "amateurs," Texas has a history of brushing aside religious efforts as unprofessional and unsystematic. As a result, many addicts - with lives often marked by criminal behavior, lack of health insurance, welfare dependence --are denied a proven way to escape their destructive lifestyle.

The Texas Legislature passes a House Bill, which created an alternative accreditation process for faith-based providers. Texas can now strike a strong and tightly-drawn balance between the need for accountability and the realization that overly intrusive and burdensome regulations drive committed caregivers from the market and deprives Texas of their contributions.